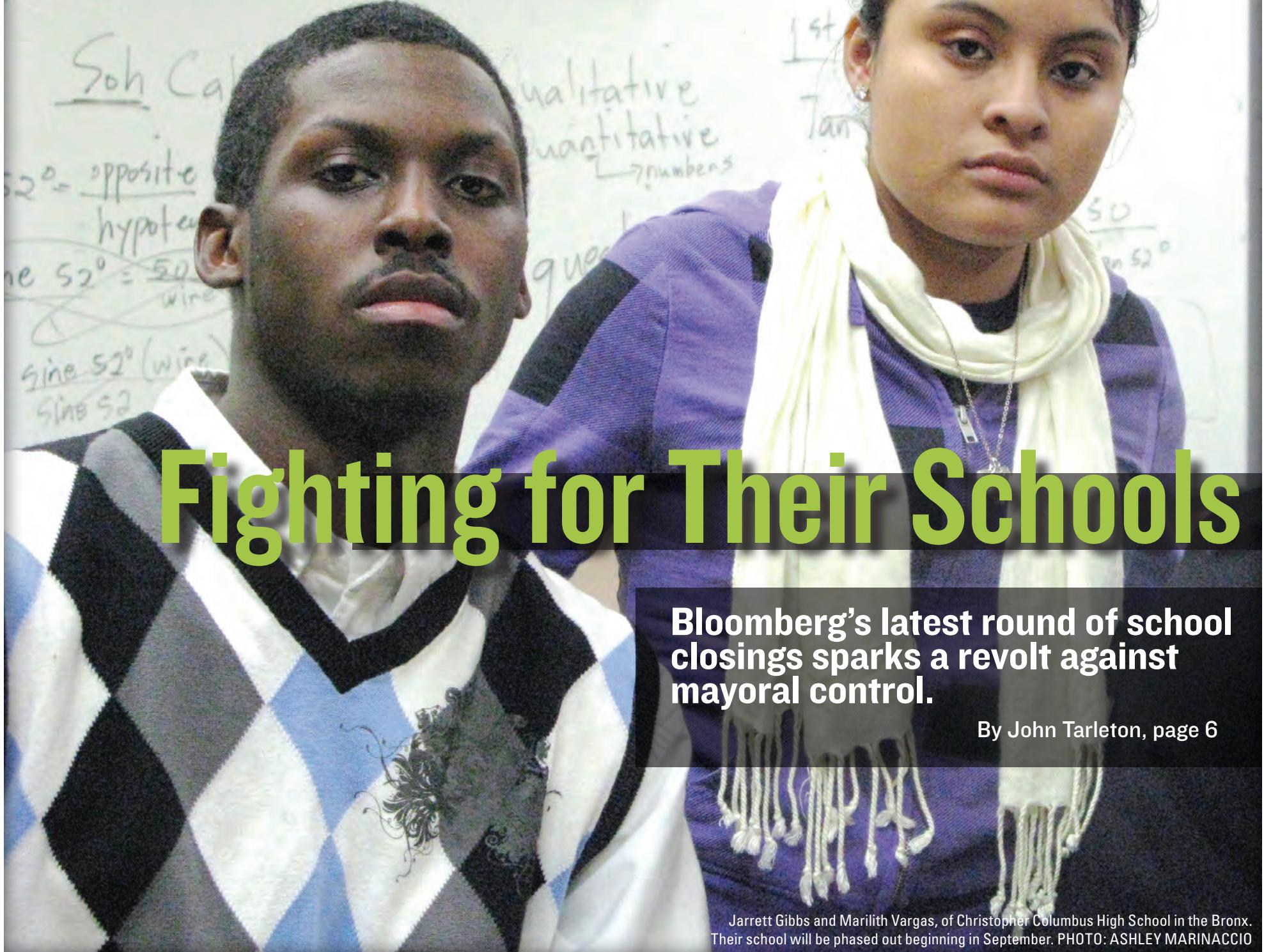


THE INDYPENDENT

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A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE



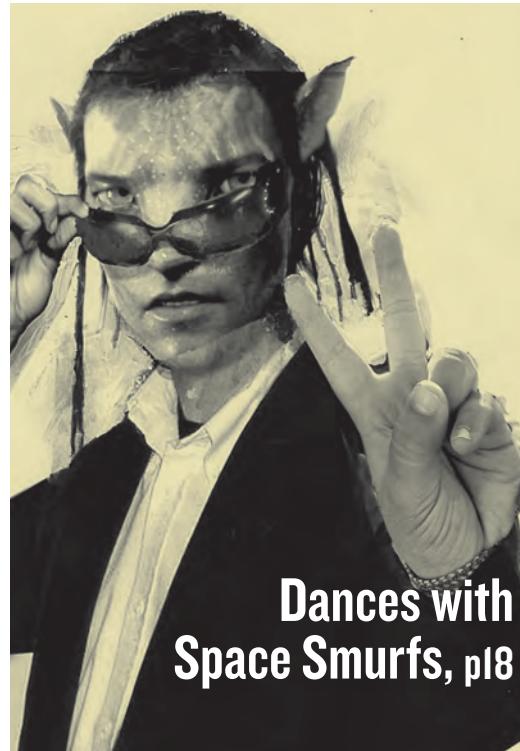
Fighting for Their Schools

Bloomberg's latest round of school closings sparks a revolt against mayoral control.

By John Tarleton, page 6

Jarrett Gibbs and Mariliith Vargas, of Christopher Columbus High School in the Bronx. Their school will be phased out beginning in September. PHOTO: ASHLEY MARINACCIO

Haiti, after the Quake, p12



Dances with Space Smurfs, p18



Immigrant Youth Step Out, p4

City Cracks Down on Illegal Hotels

BY MICHAEL MARTIN

While Oscar Tenorio lives in a one-room apartment on the Upper West Side, his living situation is quite different from his more affluent neighbors. He shares bathroom and kitchen facilities with other tenants. In the hallways, wires and pipes hang from the ceilings, and crushed bedbugs dot the walls. There are holes in the walls and floors and bare light bulbs illuminate the hallways.

With such untenable living conditions, Tenorio's address, 244 West 99th Street, also known as Hotel 99, might seem a bit confusing.

Hotel 99 is a Single Resident Occupancy (SRO) building that was illegally converted into a hotel. Its SRO status means that the building is rent stabilized and intended for low-income New Yorkers, which only offers management companies a fraction of the profits that can be made by charging tourists a nightly fee of up to \$179.

Vacated late last year, Hotel 99's closure, along with a handful of other hotels clustered in the Upper West Side, is part of the most recent crackdown on illegal hotels in the city.

According to Hotel 99's partial vacate notice, which was issued by the Mayor's Office of Special Enforcement, the hotel portion of the building was closed down for fire code and other violations.

While the hotel section of the building is still empty, it remains to be seen for how long its doors will stay closed. There is currently no law against illegal hotels in New York City, and the city is often limited to fining hotels for violating fire, occupancy and zoning codes in an effort to keep these establishments in check. Building owners caught operating illegal hotels in buildings zoned for residential use are only fined \$800, what Yarrow Willman-Cole, a tenant organizer with the Goddard Riverside SRO Project, calls a "cost of operation."

"It's a legal gray area and enforcement is happening specifically where there are safety concerns, but there are other issues that can be considered [in trying to shut illegal



FORGOTTEN TENANTS: This unfinished hallway in the back section of Hotel 99 in the Upper West Side is one of many projects the building's owner has failed to complete. PHOTO: MICHAEL MARTIN

hotels down], such as zoning, permitted use in the certificate of occupancy and the fire code," Willman-Cole said.

Hotel 99 is just one part of a complex web of illegal hotels throughout the city. According to the West Side Neighborhood Alliance, a nonprofit group that seeks to provide safe and affordable housing, as of 2009 there were 270 illegal hotels across Manhattan, Queens and Brooklyn.

Tenorio, who was asked by building man-

agement to move to the back of the building to make way for the construction of the hotel, has, like many of the other residents, not seen the hotel section of the building, which features lapis-tile hallways and cream-colored walls.

The original construction permit that Ronald Oved, the building's co-owner, obtained in 2009 indicated that he would refurbish the public areas of the SRO building. Instead, Oved was constructing a hotel. Oved declined to comment for this article.

In addition to being subjected to substandard living conditions and waiting months for repairs, SRO tenants at Hotel 99 are prohibited from installing air conditioners in their rooms, having guests and bringing alcoholic beverages into the building.

Hipolito Sierra, one of the building's tenants, has waited several months for repairs and improved sanitation in the residential half of the building. Sierra last spoke to Peter Cabrera,

the building manager, two months ago. "I think [Cabrera] prefers the tourists, because he makes money. But with [tenants] he doesn't care about where they have to live," Sierra said. Cabrera also declined to comment for this article.

Willman-Cole is organizing Hotel 99 tenants to participate in a lawsuit for repairs. Though she believes that management will eventually repair the residential section, a lawsuit will help expedite the process and

empower tenants, Willman-Cole said. She declined to discuss the details of the lawsuit, as well as the number of tenants participating, due to fear of negatively affecting the outcome of the lawsuit.

Many tenants are afraid to confront landlords. Some are full families, violating codes allowing only two tenants per SRO and barring children. Others are undocumented and fear owners will call Immigration Services in retaliation.

Tenorio has joined a slowly growing number of tenants who have signed on to the lawsuit and, while he is undocumented, is glad to represent other undocumented residents who are reluctant to come forward.

Councilmember Gale Brewer (D-Manhattan) has been working to increase the fine and clarify the city's stance against illegal hotels. "We were not able to change that law [at the city level], because we have to go through the state," Brewer said, "It has been two years."

Bob Kalin, tenant organizer from the Housing Conservation Coordinators (HCC), which also funds the West Side Neighborhood Alliance, explained that many in the New York City tourism industry oppose legislation against illegal hotels because of some "old, traditional hotels that exist in New York City that aren't strictly in compliance with some laws." Kalin said the HCC is still "plugging away" toward legislation.

The HCC currently has a group of tenants and elected officials — including State Senator Tom Duane, Speaker Christine Quinn and Brewer — working to address the issue of illegal hotels in New York City. While converting illegal hotels into affordable housing is definitely a goal, this effort will take a significant amount of effort from the mayor's office, city council and the state legislature, said Jackie Del Valle, HCC's organizing director.

While the future of legislation banning illegal hotels is uncertain, Del Valle said housing advocates expect that there will be a move towards better enforcement and clearer legislation on illegal hotels as the state legislature resumes this month.

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Mercer St. Books
206 Mercer St.

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Sixth Ave. & 9th St.

Brecht Forum
451 West St.

4th Street Food Co-op
58 E. 4th St

Theater for the New City
155 First Ave.

14TH TO 96TH ST.

Manhattan Neighborhood Network
537 W. 59th St.

Housing Conservation Co-ordinators 777 Tenth Ave.

Domus 413
W. 44th St.

New York Public Library
Muhlenberg Branch
209 W. 23rd St.

ABOVE 96TH ST.

Kim's Video
114th St. & Bway

New York Public Library
George Bruce Branch
518 W. 125th St.

New York Public Library
Countee Cullen Branch
104 W. 136th St.

New York Public Library

Morningside Branch
114th St. & Broadway

Uptown Sister's Books
156 St. & Amsterdam

BROOKLYN

Brooklyn Museum
200 Eastern Pkwy.

BAM

30 Lafayette Ave.

Vox Pop
1022 Cortelyou Rd.

Tillie's of Brooklyn
248 DeKalb Ave.

Tea Lounge
Union St. & 7th Ave.

Video Gallery
310 7th Ave.

Ozzie's Coffee Shop
249 5th Ave. & 57 7th Ave.

Verb Café

Bedford Ave. & N. 5th St.
308 Bedford Ave.

Pillow Café

505 Myrtle Ave.

Sisters Community

Hardware

900 Fulton St.

Brooklyn Public Library

Pacific Street Branch

25 Fourth Ave.

Clear Spin Laundromat

192 Myrtle Ave.

Outpost Café

1014 Fulton St.

Blackbird Café

197 Bedford Ave.

'sNice Café

315 5th Ave.

Brooklyn Public Library

Pacific Branch
561 Pacific St.

Brooklyn Public Library
Bedford Branch

496 Franklin St.

BRONX

The Point

940 Garrison Ave.

Brook Park

141st St. & Brook Ave.

Mother's on the Move

928 Intervale St.

South Bronx Food Co-Op

3103 Third Ave. / 158th St.
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OUT IN FRONT: Four immigrant college students are trekking 1,500 miles in a five-month campaign from Miami to Washington, D.C., to rally in support of "education, not deportation" for undocumented youth and their families.

PHOTO: EVA GRAY

Walking the Dream

BY KAREN YI

Miami-Dade Community College student Felipe Matos has a new schedule this spring semester. Each day starts with a 5:30 a.m. wake-up call, a big breakfast, a quick stretch and securing his feet with a thick layer of duct tape. Then Matos sets off for a 17-mile walk interspersed by several breaks of singing songs, and later stops to sleep in a different place every night — RVs, churches or even strangers' homes.

The thick blisters that have developed on his feet after walking 250 miles beg him to stop. But this semester of learning has only just begun. Along with three other immigrant students, Matos, 23, is trekking 1,500 miles in a five-month campaign that launched Jan. 1 from Miami and will end in Washington, D.C., to rally in support of "education not deportation" for undocumented youth and their families.

"It was hitting home and it was time for us to get up and act," said Gaby Pacheco, 25, an undocumented immigrant living in Miami, whose family is in deportation proceedings. "Our communities couldn't wait anymore," said Pacheco, a music therapy student at Miami-Dade College.

Four youth will walk the entirety of the trip — Pacheco, Matos and two other students, Carlos Roa, 22, an architecture student at Miami-Dade, and Juan Rodriguez, 20, who recently became a permanent resident and hopes to study sociology in Chicago.

Named the "Trail of Dreams," the walk has four guiding goals: a pathway to citizenship, greater access to education, workers' rights and the end of the separation of families. The campaign was launched by Students Working for Equal Rights, the Florida Immigration Coalition and presente.org, a group that works to promote the political empowerment of Latino communities.

"It's courageous and inspiring what these young people are doing," said Norman Eng, director of media relations at the New York Immigration Coalition. "It's been a very effective way to highlight the plight of immigrants like themselves. I think we're all marching with them in spirit."

The Trail of Dreams comes at a time when immigrant-rights groups across the country have mobilized to reinvigorate the push for the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act)

introduced in 2001 to offer a route to legal residency to graduating undocumented high school students living in the country for more than five years.

A report by College Board Advocacy, "Young Lives on Hold: The College Dreams of Undocumented Students," found that 65,000 undocumented students living in the country for more than five years graduate from high school annually. While they can legally attend most colleges, they are not eligible for financial aid.

The laws vary by state and are a source of confusion due to constantly fluctuating state and local policies. Only 10 states allow undocumented students to pay in-state tuition rates. Current New York policy states that undocumented youth need to be enrolled in an in-state high school for two years to be eligible for in-state tuition. Higher education is just not an option for many undocumented students who have no access to financial aid and no legal authorization to work.

Approximately two million undocumented children live in the United States, roughly 15 percent of the entire undocumented population.

The Trail of Dreams marchers stop every day at lunch to meet with churches, organizations, schools and state and local representatives to exchange stories of struggle and words of hope.

"Listening to little children that [are] five that understand that their parents could get deported and they could be torn apart from them," says Matos, is so far proving to be the hardest part of the journey.

While the march is inspiring organizations nationwide to continue working for comprehensive immigration reform, the organizers say they are not campaigning for any specific law or policy.

"What we're setting out to do is change the hearts and minds of people," Pacheco said.

Still crossing through northern Florida, the four students will continue to walk until arriving in Washington on May 1, a national day of worker and immigrant rights.

Pacheco said that it's time for young immigrant communities to stop living in fear. "We're coming out of the shadows, we're going into the light and saying, 'Here we are, the undocumented youth that have so much potential and so much desire to make this country a better country.'"



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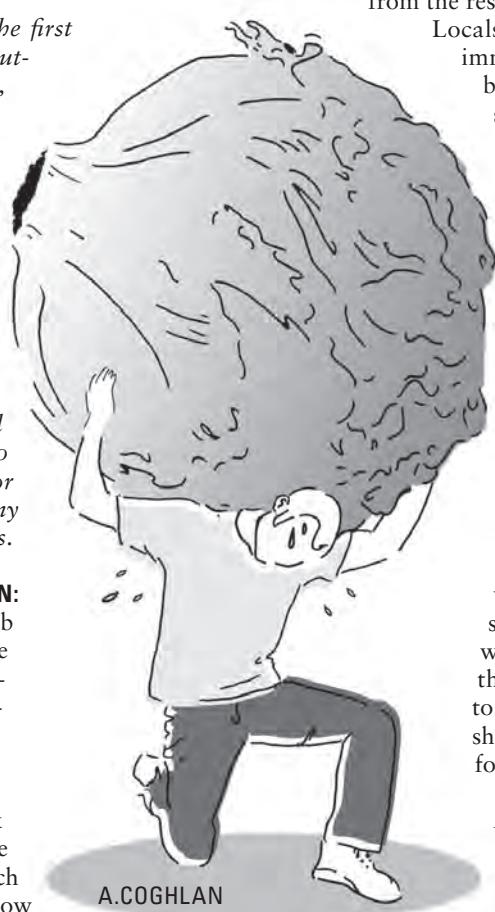
The Value of Work

BY MICAH WILLIAMS

Behind the products we buy is a hidden work force of immigrants who are slaughtering animals at breakneck speed, dodging pedestrians and reckless cars to deliver food on bicycles, and breaking their backs picking vegetables. Yet somehow the value of these laborers has been kept out of the debate on immigration reform.

Investigative journalist Gabriel Thompson hopes to change that. In his newly released book, *Working in the Shadows: A Year of Doing Jobs Americans Won't Do* (Nation Books), he goes undercover to work alongside immigrant laborers across the country to reveal what transpires in these jobs.

MICAH WILLIAMS: The first job you took was cutting lettuce in Yuma, Ariz., and then you moved on to a chicken factory in Alabama. Anti-immigration activists charge Mexican immigrants with taking the jobs of U.S. citizens, but you found that you had to battle to get hired because you're Anglo — despite their labor shortage, the company only wants Mexicans.



GABRIEL THOMPSON: I came into each job with zero experience and was hired immediately. It'd be educational for people screaming about immigrants stealing jobs to spend a week (or an hour) at these jobs. There isn't much competition right now — they could steal the jobs back, if they wanted.

In addition to its chicken plant, I chose Russellville, Ala. to see locals' reactions to immigrants' presence in a poor, rural town. I expected tension, but also there was surprisingly little. No one in Russellville thinks "immigrants shouldn't be here because they're taking the chicken jobs." They think, "Immigrants are here because people can't last in this work."

MW: The injury rates at these jobs are astronomical. In the United States, the average farm worker's life expectancy is 49 years — equal to the average citizen of Somalia. Is it possible to envision such work becoming humane and decent?

GT: The work's structure is part of a bigger problem: the drive to make things as cheap as possible. One of the only costs plant owners can control is labor, so they squeeze as much as possible from workers. These jobs need government enforcement and union organizing, but expectations of worker output must change. If you have a union, but are still making 18,000 cuts [of meat] per shift, you'll still have serious health problems.

These conditions persist partially because companies work hard to ensure no one sees behind the scenes. When thinking of chicken, people think of a KFC com-

mercial — not a worker tearing apart 7,000 chicken breasts by hand in one shift. The plant fired me immediately upon learning I was a journalist. From their perspective, the less people know about where food comes from, the better.

MW: May 1, 2006, is known for immigrant marches in large cities like Chicago and Los Angeles, but you say the impact in towns like Russellville was "more profound." What happened?

GT: The immigration drama had played out quietly there. There were more immigrants coming in, and people knew that, but immigrants lived in trailers outside of town and near the [chicken] plant, segregated from the rest of the community.

Locals said, "We know immigrants are here, but as long as they're scared and aren't fighting, we'll deal with them." People saw the first marches on TV and thought they'd never happen in Russellville. Then 500 immigrants spontaneously marched through downtown. People became scared and angry, because these immigrants were unafraid to assert their rights and weren't acting like they were supposed to. That was an earth-shattering moment for the town.

MW: How would comprehensive immigration reform change these jobs?

GT: Anti-immigrants say we need to be tough on law-breaking immigrants, but the situation is actually hard on low-wage U.S. workers. Improving these jobs won't happen without worker activism; as long as a large number of workers aren't confident about highlighting abuses or involvement in organizing campaigns due to their immigration status, those industries are going to stay very unhealthy. Comprehensive immigration reform would be good for undocumented immigrants, but would also benefit the low-wage American citizens working shoulder-to-shoulder with them.

MW: You've also worked as a housing organizer and union researcher. What lessons did you learn throughout the year for organizing immigrant communities?

GT: No matter how bad these jobs were, there was much worker solidarity. When U.S. citizens and non-citizens work side by side, barriers to organizing come down. But these industries can't be organized without a plan for addressing immigrants' issues.

To read more about Gabriel Thompson's experience working in the factories and fields alongside immigrant laborers, read the longer version of this interview online at indypendent.org.

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Taking the Public Out of Schools

BY JOHN TARLETON

As soon as New York City Department of Education Chancellor Joel Klein leaned into his microphone and started to speak, the jeering began. When he proclaimed the DOE had to shut down 19 schools because "my first obligation is to our

administrative structures to be more remote from parents, spending millions on high-priced consultants and no-bid contracts, pushing high-stakes testing regimes that lack a sound pedagogical basis and closing scores of neighborhood schools.

When the DOE announced its proposed school closings in December, it struck a nerve. It was the largest rounds of school closings to date and it hit large high schools that have anchored their neighborhoods — Maxwell and Robeson in Brooklyn, Jamaica and Beach Channel in Queens and Columbus and Alfred E. Smith in the Bronx — especially hard.

Rallies and marches were held. At the affected campuses, hundreds of people turned out for hearings that were mandated under new State rules passed last summer. On Jan. 21, a feisty crowd of almost 400 demonstrators marched outside Bloomberg's Upper East Side mansion.

"You have the pieces of a perfect storm starting to brew," said Lisa Donlan, president of the District 1 Community Education Council in the Lower East Side. "Before, they did this and there were no consequences."

The opposition to the school closings was propelled by a profusion of small groups many of them working under the umbrella of the Grassroots Education Movement (GEM). Participants included radical teachers union activists, students, parents and community groups that had already been fighting charter school invasions on their home turf.

In Red Hook, parents and educators from P.S. 15 mobilized against the DOE plan to expand PAVE Academy's presence inside their school for another five years. The DOE claims the P.S. 15 school building is underutilized, a rationale it frequently invokes to justify moving an additional school into an already existing school.

P.S. 15 serves a large population of special education and English language learners, and has received A's on the DOE's annual progress report for the past three years. But all of that is at risk as PAVE, whose founder is the son of prominent hedge fund billionaire, continues to grow (see center spread).

"Beginning in year four we will have no other classrooms except for enrollment generating classrooms ... and our class size would start to rise," said P.S. 15 special education teacher Julie Cavanagh, one of the lead organizers of the Jan. 21 protest in front of Bloomberg's home. "To us, under-utilized means we have room for small class size, we have room for pull out intervention. We have room for one-on-one counseling. We have

room for dance, we have room for music, we have room for art. We have room for the services our special ed kids need and to get them in the private setting that they deserve. Not in the hallway, not in the closet, not in the corner of a library."

Gov. David Paterson has joined Mayor Bloomberg in calling on the State legislature to abolish the current statewide cap on the number of charter schools which stands at 200. This effort stalled in mid-January but is likely to be revived again as the Obama administration continues to dangle millions of dollars of education aid in front of states that lift charter caps.

Critics of charter schools, including the powerful United Federation of Teachers, which represents 87,000 New York City school teachers, have called on the State legislature to amend the law to ensure that charter schools are open to all students, that their finances are transparent and that public monies are not wasted on excessive management fees or administrators' salaries before raising the cap.

Back in New York City, it remains to be seen if organizers can build on the energy that was unleashed in the past month. Angel Gonzalez, a retired Bronx middle school teacher who co-founded GEM, wants to see teacher, parent and student groups coalesce into Save Our School committees.

"We are only beginning to wake up our sleeping giant, which is our community," Gonzalez said. "We're fighting a corporate power that has billions of dollars and Bloomberg is their front man. Eventually people are going to see through that."



IGNORED: More than 300 people spoke against school closings at a Jan. 26 meeting of the Panel for Education Policy (PEP). After hearing nine hours of public comments, the PEP voted 9-4 to close 19 schools. PHOTO: ANDREW HINDERAKER

children," the crowd of two thousand public school supporters roared in disbelief.

Over the next nine hours, more than 300 speakers challenged Klein's reasoning, his motives and his right to decide the fate of their local schools at the Jan. 26 meeting of the Panel for Education Policy (PEP) held at Brooklyn Technical High School. The PEP, whose majority was selected by Mayor Michael Bloomberg, would ultimately approve all 19 school closings by a 9-4 vote in the middle of the night. Yet, there was little doubt that the panel's action would end the growing controversy over the way Klein and Bloomberg are managing the City's schools. "Education is a right," said one parent as she waited to speak. "If we don't fight, we're going to lose it."

The drama that unfolded at the PEP meeting was the product of years of simmering frustration in communities across the city. When Bloomberg plucked Klein, a lawyer, out of the corporate world in 2002 to oversee over a school system that educates 1.1 million children in more than 1,500 schools, he promised a new era of mayoral accountability.

Instead, critics say the two men have exercised their power in an arbitrary and reckless manner — reorganizing the system's admin-

"You have the pieces of a perfect storm starting to brew. Before, they did this and there were no consequences," says Lisa Donlan, Lower East Side parent activist.

Websites to Watch

Grassroots Education Movement
grassrootseducationmovement.blogspot.com

Education Notes Online
ednotesonline.blogspot.com

Edwize: Education News & Opinion
edwize.org

Eduwonkette
blogs.edweek.org/edweek/eduwonkette

Class Size Matters
classsizematters.org

Susan Ohanian Speaks Out
susanoian.org.

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TAKING IT TO THE MAN: Opponents of Mayor Bloomberg's school closings plan march Jan. 21 outside his mansion (back right) at 17 East 79th Street in Manhattan. PHOTO: SOPHIE FORBES

FIRST PERSON

Stealing the Best and Brightest

BY SEUNG OK

For all my anger, I do not believe that Mayor Bloomberg and his fellow billionaires are acting maliciously when they close public schools and replace them with charter schools.

These billionaires walk into charter schools and they say to themselves, "Oh my God, black and brown kids can learn?" They see black faces, and based the negative stereotypes that they viewed in their lives, the fact that minority students can excel at all seems a miracle. But, how much time did they ever spend in a neighborhood like East New York or Harlem? Probably no more

The secret of it all is the top-level students that they entice from our public schools.

than a matter of hours. They leave a charter school feeling exuberant, as if they had discovered something that the rest of society somehow overlooked.

However, it is not the new paint of charter schools, nor the potpourri they put in bathrooms, nor the new teachers whose energy and fortitude is burnt out within a few years. The secret of it all is the top-level students that they entice from our public schools — the core group of students in every grade level of every neighborhood that excels — those that

become surgeons and engineers and lawyers.

The more years I spend as a teacher dealing with kids, the more I'm convinced that kids and adults are very much the same ... people are followers. When you take the top students from district schools, you are in essence removing the positive role models of students who need that extra push to say, "Hey, this is what I should strive for." You are removing from a neighborhood the student leaders, the positive middle class and professionals that offer a growing child an alternative to the gloom and doom of gangs, drugs, teenage pregnancy and high dropout rates.

The main argument for closing a public high school is that less than 50 percent of the students graduate in four years. But why do so many people assume that a high-school diploma in four years is so much greater than one attained in five years? Do corporate interviewers ask a college graduate whether she or he took five or six years to get a degree? If a student in our public school system survives in shelters and foster homes and struggles to attain a high school diploma in five years — doesn't that student deserve more credit than one who was expected to graduate and go to college in four years? Doesn't she or he show even more character, drive and potential than a Bloomberg?

Seung Ok is a living environment teacher at William H. Maxwell High School in Brooklyn, which is scheduled to be phased out starting in September.

NEW YORK CITY SCHOOLS *by the numbers*

\$12.5 BILLION: Annual New York City Department of Education (DOE) budget (2002)

66,895: Number of K-3 schoolchildren in classes of 25 or more during the 2008-09 school year.

\$21 BILLION: Annual New York City DOE budget (2009)

15,440: Average number of seats per year built during the last six years of the Rudolph Giuliani administration.

1,719: Number officials employed by the DOE central administration in June 2002

10,895: Average number of seats per year built during the first six years of the Bloomberg administration.

2,442: Number of officials employed by the central administration as of November 2008

27.2: Percentage of newly hired teachers in 2001-02 who were Black.

14.1: Percentage of newly hired teachers in 2006-07 who were Black.

53.3: Percentage of newly hired teachers in 2001-02 who were white.

65.5: Percentage of newly hired teachers in 2006-07 who were white.

76: Percentage of white and Asian students who performed better than the average Black and Latino students in 8th grade English Language Arts (ELA) in 2003.

75: Percentage of white and Asian students who performed better than the average Black and Hispanic students in 8th grade ELA in 2008.

\$67.5 MILLION: Annual budget of Project Arts, a decade-old program that was the sole source of dedicated funding for arts education. It was eliminated in 2007.

77: Percentage of white and Asian students who performed better than the average Black and Hispanic 8th graders in math in 2003.

81: Percentage of white and Asian students who performed better than the average Black and Hispanic 8th graders in math in 2008.

54: Percentage of New York City public school parents who disapproved of Mayor Bloomberg's handling of education, according to a March 2009 Quinnipiac poll.

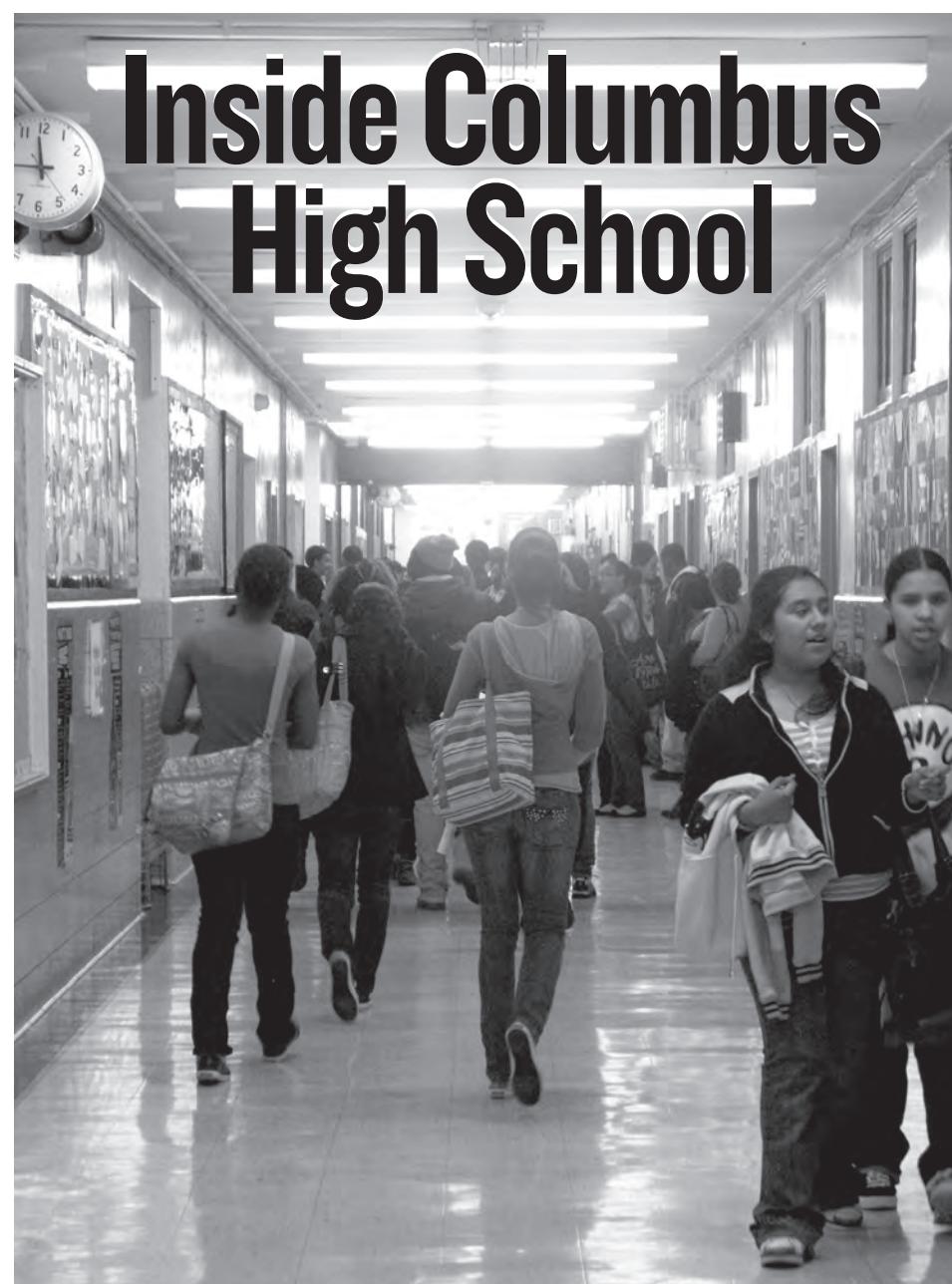
—JOHN TARLETON

Sources: New York City Council, New York City Comptroller's Office, New York Daily News, New York Post, Eduwonkette, Quinnipiac Institute, Black Educator, Class Size Matters, New York City Schools Under Bloomberg and Klein.



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BY MARY ANNAISE HEGLAR

Brittany Rosado, who attends Christopher Columbus High School in the Northeast Bronx, used to belong to a gang and skip class regularly. Now, after being accepted into Columbus' Renaissance program, Rosado is on track to graduate.

"When my mother started to give up on me," she says, "I came to Renaissance because I wanted a chance." Rosado, an eloquent senior with an infectious smile, now talks enthusiastically about her goal to attend Fordham University.

However, Rosado and the school's 1,400 other students will be the last to attend Columbus High School.

New York City's Panel for Educational Policy (PEP) voted on Jan. 27 to phase out Columbus High School, along with 18 other schools in the Bronx, Manhattan, Queens and Brooklyn, over the next three years.

The New York City Department of Education (DOE) says it is closing these schools because of "poor performance" and low standardized test scores.

This is a matter of dispute. While Columbus' numerical score on its DOE progress report has steadily improved every year since the measure was instituted in 2006, its letter grade has remained a "C" because the scale keeps changing. In fact, in 2007, the school's score improved so much that all the faculty and administration received a bonus. In 2009, however, Columbus received a "D" from the DOE because the grading scale changed by 10 points that year, according to Christine Rowland, United Federation of Teachers Teacher Center staff member at Columbus.

"We needed a 40 percent improvement to reach a 'C,' even though we [technically] had one already," said Rowland.

Many teachers maintain that since the DOE only tracks test scores year to year and fails to account for social barriers many students face, the department is effectively stacking the deck

HEAVY LOAD: Students at Christopher Columbus High School in the Northeast Bronx hurry between classes. The school does not provide lockers, so the students must carry their books and coats with them all day. PHOTO: ASHLEY MARINACCIO

against large high schools.

At Columbus, nearly 18 percent of students are English Language Learners. Almost a quarter of the students have special needs, which can range from learning to physical disabilities. Almost 14 percent of students are "self-contained" special needs students, meaning students whose disabilities are so severe that they must take their classes separate from the general population.

"There was a strong correlation between the percentage of self-contained students and the progress report grade. Schools that received 'Ds' had four times the percentage of self-contained students than schools that received 'As,'" said Rowland.

Further, both standardized tests and progress reports alike fail to account for the myriad difficulties that public schools like Columbus face, including overcrowding and under-funding.

"We have to look at the context of the data," says Rowland. "It's about the children we serve, who are not the same from school to school."

Eight of the 13 members of the PEP that voted to close Columbus were appointed by Mayor Michael Bloomberg. Many observers view the decision as the latest step in Bloomberg's move to close large schools and break them into clusters of smaller public and charter schools.

Phillip Romero, an English teacher at Columbus, is wary of the implications of this vote.

"The American public education system is one of the best ideas our forefathers ever had, and it's being thrown out without so much as an afterthought," he said. "The American teacher has become a whipping dog."

Since the mayor was granted control of the system in 2002, the city has closed or plans to shut down a total of 110 schools, including many large high schools.

"Honestly, I feel like someone died today," said Columbus Principal Lisa Fuentes. She added that the school had counselors on call to help students deal with the move to close the school.

"The students' emotions range from sad to angry. They keep asking what they can do. They are having a hard time accepting that it's final."

ALLOWABLE CASUALTIES

This is not the first time that the city has tried to close Columbus High School. In 2002, the DOE effectively downsized Columbus and its student body of 4,500 by moving five smaller high schools into Columbus' four-story building. By 2003, after these new schools had cherry-picked Columbus' best-performing students and squeezed the rest into an overcrowded space, the DOE announced plans to close the school.

Columbus attempted to handle the overflow with a split schedule: 11th and 12th graders attended school from 7 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and the ninth and 10th graders from 12:30 to 5:30 p.m. Columbus underclassmen were unable to participate in after-school sports, activities, or even tutoring due to the schedule. The smaller schools maintained a regular schedule and participated in Columbus' sports teams.

Classes were taught in any open space. There could be eight classes of 40 students each being taught in the library at the same time. "It was like teaching in a subway car," says Karen Sherwood, an English teacher of 17 years. "They looked at our kids as allowable casualties."

The DOE eventually reversed its decision in light of the staff's efforts to present the department with data that proved Columbus' students were being treated unfairly and that the school was actually not failing. And despite the difficult conditions, Columbus was still managing to consistently beat the city's graduation rate.

Columbus has the second-most-challenging student body in the city, according to the DOE. Unlike other smaller public schools, it is required by the DOE to accept all students who choose to attend; it also receives a disproportionate amount of students with criminal records and accepts new students throughout the school year.

Overcrowding is a persistent issue at Columbus. Students do not have lockers and are required to carry their coats and books with them throughout the day. In many classrooms, every seat is occupied.

The school offers three programs designed to meet the needs of students with a record of behavioral and academic difficulty. The Women's Empowerment and Boys II Men programs focus on building a positive self-image and are geared toward ninth and 10th graders; the Renaissance program is aimed at 11th and 12th grade students.

The close attention and support provided by these programs — through a network of teachers, social workers and academic advisors — often makes a significant difference for students.

"We did not give up on them," Principal Fuentes said. "Our students are who they are not because of what we've done for them, but because of the chances we've given them."

Another reason for Columbus' success is its extensive extracurricular offerings. There are more than 20 varsity sports teams, a cheerleading squad, a step team and five school bands. The curriculum also includes drama, culinary arts, and other programs.

Tenth-grader Javier Torres travels more than an hour each day to Columbus from his home in Soundview in the Southeast Bronx because it was the only school that accepted him after his local high school was closed in 2009. His grade point average has improved from 63 to 80 since he enrolled, and he plans to try out to play right field for Columbus' baseball team this spring. He hopes to play baseball for a college team and, later, the New York Yankees.

FOCUS ON SUCCESSES

When the DOE proposed closing Columbus last month, the school community quickly mobilized. A rally of students, teachers and parents outside a Jan. 7 DOE hearing about closing Columbus drew more than 1,000 people. Staff members even started a Facebook group, "Save Columbus!," which currently has more than 1,900 members.

The PEP's Jan. 27 decision to close Columbus has left students and teachers disappointed and angry.

"My students will definitely feel like second-class students," said Fuentes. "They feel like failures because they are called failures. We try not to make them feel that way. We try to focus on their successes."

When Jaime Chahalis, an New York City teaching fellow who teaches self-contained special needs students at Columbus, asked her students to write an essay on their plans for the future, the vast majority wrote that they wanted to go to college. "They don't want to hear that that's not an option," she says. "We can get them there, but the DOE is cutting us off at the knees."

Rowland, who has worked at Columbus for eight years, says that the DOE's decision to close the school will do more harm than good.

"These are kids that don't have a lot of options and the city just doesn't seem to care. The impact is on the least fortunate students. They are just being shuffled around. It's disgusting," she said tearfully.

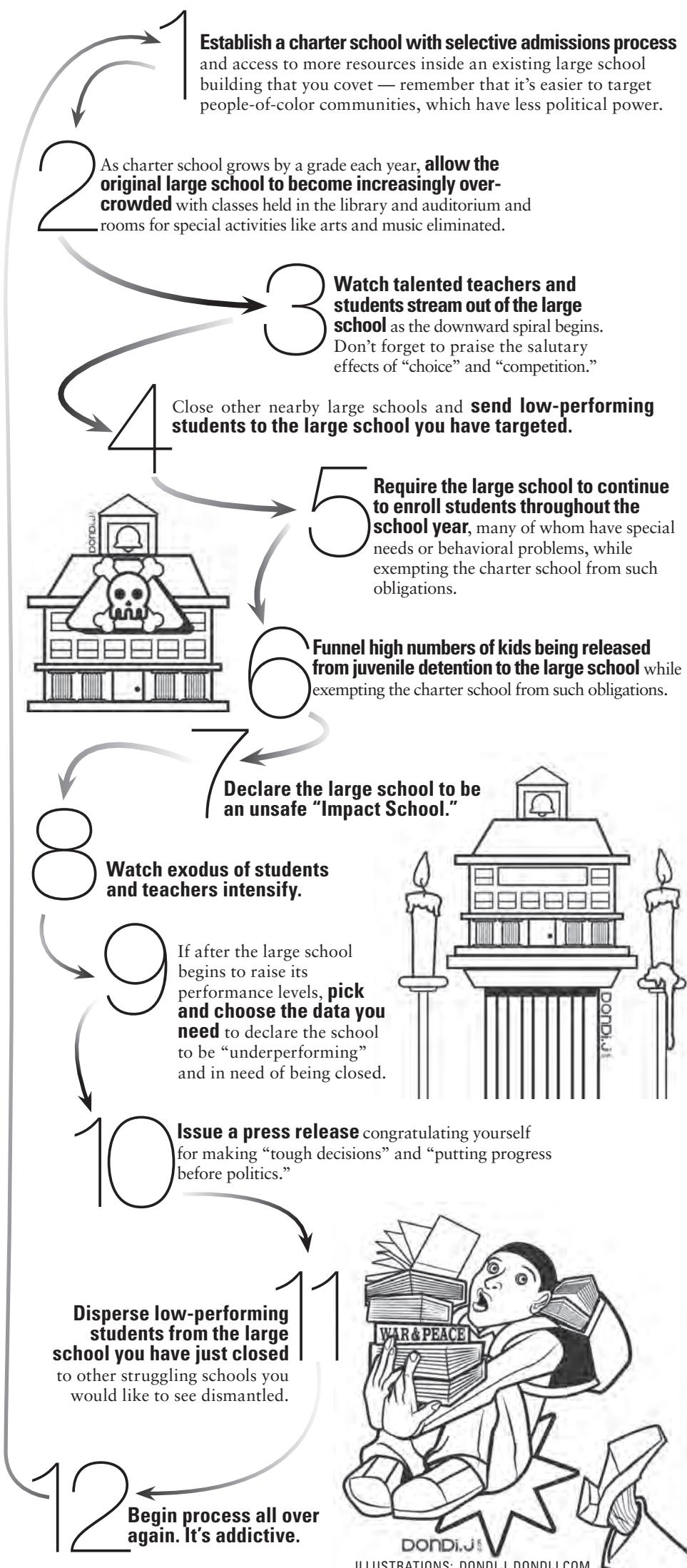


CARING EDUCATORS: Columbus High School student Adela Lopez receives extra attention from her math teacher, Mrs. Fundo, as she prepares for the Regents examination. PHOTO: ASHLEY MARINACCIO

BLOOMBERG'S 12-STEP METHOD

BY JOHN TARLETON

There is a method to his madness. Bloomberg and his Chancellor Joel Klein have initiated shut down or initiated the closing of more than 100 public schools, many of which have deep roots in their communities. No two situations are exactly alike. Nonetheless, here is a handy template to go by if you are a mayor who is eager to break up large public schools and hand over their buildings to privately run charter school operations, but don't want to leave your fingerprints at the scene of the crime:



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THE FACES OF SCHOOL REFORM

BY JOHN TARLETON

Bill Gates

NET WORTH: \$50 BILLION



Using the Gates Foundation as his instrument, the Microsoft co-founder has channeled tens of millions of dollars into transforming large high schools through the schools-within-a-school model. Critics say boutique public schools tend to enroll (or "cream") the best students while receiving more per-pupil funding than their large-school counterparts. Gates has also allocated large sums of money to help fuel the growth of charter schools.

During the 2008 presidential election the Gates and Broad foundations teamed up to spend \$24 million to influence public education policy. Their shared message: Expand charter schools and tie teacher pay to student performance on standardized tests. President Obama's Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, has tapped top Gates Foundation officers to be his chief of staff and to head the agency's Office of Innovation and Improvement. Foundation officers are also spearheading the \$4.35 billion Race to the Top program, which promises aid to cash-strapped states that eliminate caps on charter schools and agree to place even greater emphasis on standardized testing. "It is not unfair to say that the Gates Foundation's agenda has become the country's agenda in education," says Michael Petrilli of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute.

**Arne Duncan**
SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

A Harvard-trained lawyer, Duncan led the Chicago school system from 2001 to 2008. He oversaw more than 60 school closings, primarily in people-of-color neighborhoods, while rapidly opening privately run charter schools. The Gates Foundation funneled \$63.2 million into the Chicago schools during Duncan's tenure and now Duncan is taking the "Chicago model" nationwide with the help of top aides recruited from the Gates and Broad foundations.

**Spencer Robertson**

The son of a hedge-fund billionaire who has donated \$10 million to Mayor Bloomberg's school projects since 2003, Spencer Robertson opened the PAVE Charter Academy in 2008 inside P.S. 15, a successful elementary school in Red Hook, Brooklyn. Tensions further escalated when the DOE recently announced that PAVE would be allowed to expand inside P.S. 15 over the next five years, even though Robertson has received \$26 million from the DOE to build his own school. Robertson's wife Sarah, the head of the board at Girls Prep Charter School, was at the center of a similar controversy when the school recently sought to expand inside public-school facilities in the Lower East Side.

**James Shelton**

ASSISTANT DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, DIRECTOR OF OFFICE OF INNOVATION AND IMPROVEMENT, DOE

Following Obama's election, Shelton moved seamlessly from deputy director of education at the Gates Foundation to a post at the DOE as assistant deputy director overseeing a variety of grant programs that assist charter schools. Operating at the nexus of the public, private and nonprofit sectors, Shelton previously worked at Knowledge Universe, where he launched, acquired and operated education-related businesses. Shelton's former Gates Foundation colleague Margot Rogers now serves as Duncan's chief of staff.

**Joanne Weiss**

DIRECTOR, RACE TO THE TOP PROGRAM, DOE

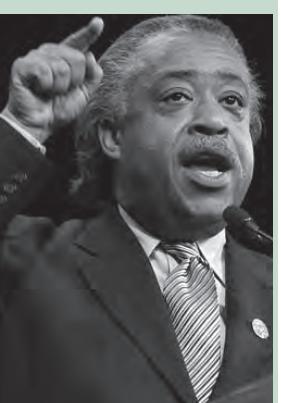
Joanne Weiss served as a director and chief operating officer for the New School Venture Fund from 1998 to 2008 before being appointed to head the Obama administration's Race to the Top program. Using venture philanthropy largesse provided by Broad, Gates and other wealthy individuals, Weiss helped incubate networks of privately controlled charter schools and charter management organizations as well as organizations to mold new teachers and principals in the education reform movement's technocratic image.

**Michael Milken and Larry Ellison**

NET WORTH: \$2 BILLION AND \$27 BILLION



Michael Milken dominated Wall Street in the 1980s using junk bonds to fuel that decade's merger mania before landing in federal prison for violating securities laws. Now, Milken has gone into the education business as chairman, co-founder and driving force behind Knowledge Universe, a multinational conglomerate that operates for-profit day-care centers and schools and makes interactive educational toys. Ellison, CEO of Oracle, co-founded the company with Milken.



Led by a band of billionaires, the school-reform movement has gained increasing momentum during the past decade, spreading its reach into urban communities across the country. But instead of truly transforming public schools, private funders want to restructure them. They insist running schools like a business is the solution. At stake is not only control over hundreds of billions of dollars in local, state and federal funding, but also the future of the next generation of schoolchildren.

Eli Broad

NET WORTH: \$5.4 BILLION



Broad, a Los Angeles-based billionaire who made his fortune in insurance and real estate, has been at the forefront of the school restructuring movement over the past decade. Using the foundation that bears his name, he has pushed aggressively for schools to be run more like businesses. The Broad (pronounced like "road") Foundation has seeded charter schools across the country, including in New York. It has also developed a number of programs to train school administrators, including the Broad Superintendent Academy, which instructs business, nonprofit, military, government and education leaders in how to manage urban school districts. A number of top officials at the New York City's Department of Education have received Broad training. Speaking at the 92nd Street Y in New York City last year, Broad summarized his approach: "We don't know anything about how to teach or reading curriculum or any of that. But what we do know about is management and governance."

**The Waltons
(Christy, Jim, Alice, S. Robson)**

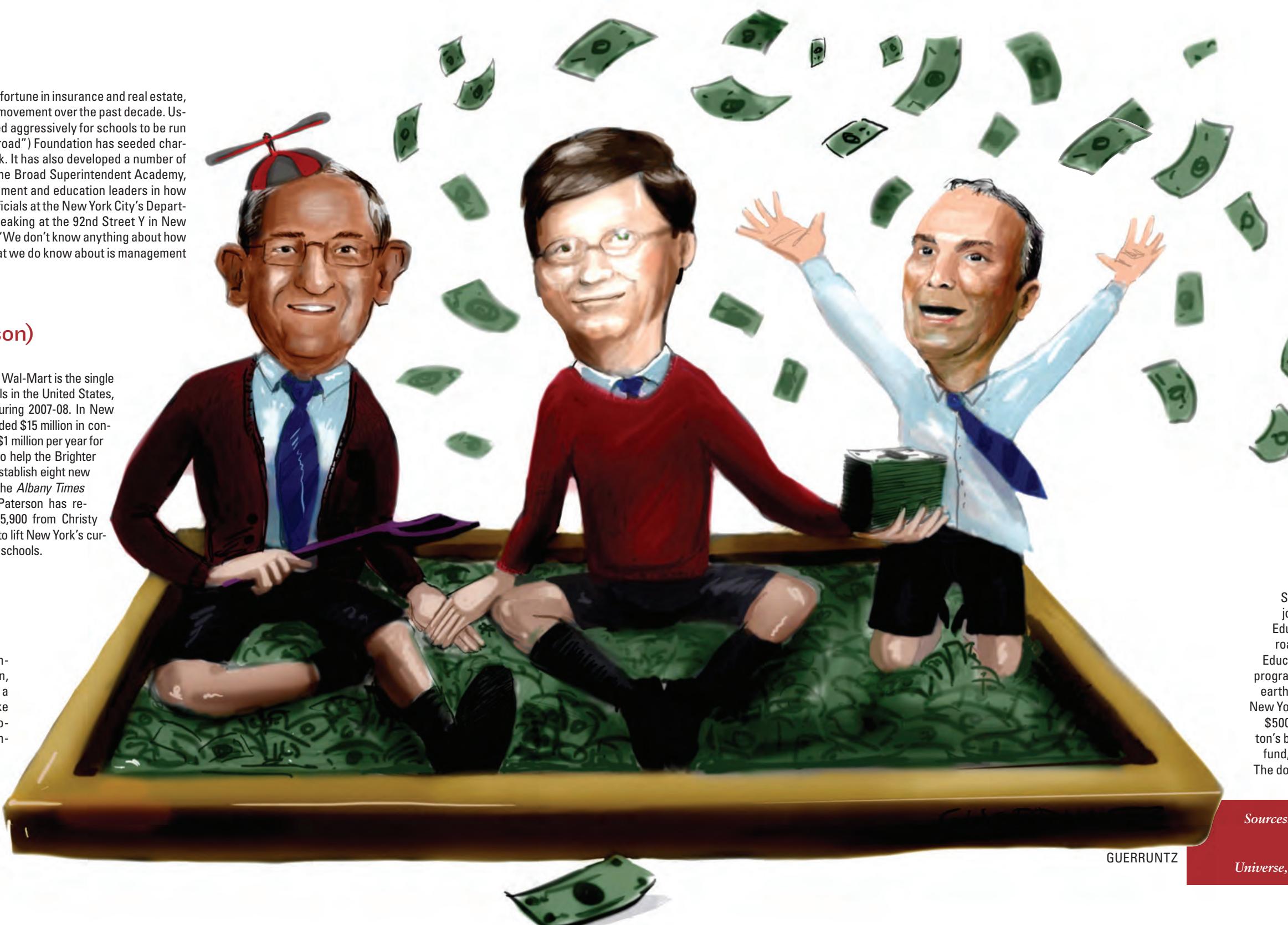
NET WORTH: \$79.4 BILLION



The Walton Family Foundation of Wal-Mart is the single biggest investor in charter schools in the United States, giving a total of \$150.3 million during 2007-08. In New York, the Walton group has provided \$15 million in construction funding plus more than \$1 million per year for operating costs in recent years to help the Brighter Choice charter school network establish eight new schools in Albany, according to the *Albany Times Union*. Meanwhile, Gov. David Paterson has received contributions totaling \$55,900 from Christy Walton, as he pushes legislation to lift New York's current statewide cap of 200 charter schools.

**Eva Moskowitz**

Moskowitz, a former Upper East Side councilmember with close ties to the Bloomberg administration, earns more than \$300,000 annually for running a chain of four small charter schools in Harlem. Like Spencer Robertson, Moskowitz has sparked protests in the predominantly people-of-color community she operates in as her schools move into existing neighborhood schools. Last April, the Broad Foundation awarded Moskowitz's Success Charter Network \$1 million over two years to support its four existing Harlem Success schools and to help it open 40 new schools in the New York City area over the next 10 years.

**Democrats for Education Reform**

Established by four New York-based hedge-fund millionaires active in the charter school movement — Whitney Tilson, Charles Ledley, John Petry and Ravanel Boykin Curry IV — this political action committee seeks to build and solidify support for corporate education-reform initiatives inside the Democratic Party, lest it be tempted to heed the concerns of teacher unions or other critics of running schools like a business.

Michael Bloomberg
NET WORTH: \$17.5 BILLION

Bloomberg spent \$75 million to win the New York mayoralty in 2001. Since then, he has used his Midas-like wealth to dominate the city's political process while pursuing a top-down, data-driven vision of school reform. When New York won the 2007 Broad Prize for Urban Education, education historian Diane Ravitch described it as "a prize conferred by one billionaire on another."

Rev. Al Sharpton

Sharpton began preaching the gospel of school reform in 2008 when he joined forces with New York Schools Chancellor Joel Klein to found the Educational Equality Project (EEP). Last fall, Sharpton went on a five-city road trip with "odd couple" buddy Newt Gingrich as well as Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to tout the Obama administration's Race to the Top program. Sharpton's support for the school reform cause has also yielded its earthly rewards. According to a March 2009 report by Juan Gonzalez of the *New York Daily News*, Sharpton's National Action Network (NAN) received a \$500,000 donation immediately following the establishment of EEP. Sharpton's benefactor: Plainfield Asset Management, a Connecticut-based hedge fund, where former schools Chancellor Harold Levy is a managing director. The donation came at a time Sharpton was set to pay \$1 million in back taxes and penalties he and NAN owed.

Sources: *Forbes* 2009 Fortune 400, *Gates Foundation*, *newschools.org*, *The New York Times*, *Broad Foundation*, *gothamschools.org*, *Walton Family Foundation*, *Albany Times Union*, *Chicago Public Schools*, *rethinkingschools.org*, *wsws.org*, U.S. Department of Education, *Knowledge Universe*, *forbes.com*, *Ed Week*, *New York Sun*, *edwize.org*, *New York Daily News*, *ednotesonline.org*.

SAME OLD INTERESTS HAVE PLAN FOR 'NEW HAITI'

BY ISABEL MACDONALD

In the wake of the earthquake that has killed almost 200,000 people in Haiti, the foreign ministers of several countries calling themselves the "Friends of Haiti" met on Jan. 25 in Montreal to discuss plans for "building a new Haiti."

Participants, who included U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, representatives of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, and Haitian Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive, came to what Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon referred to as a "road map towards Haiti's reconstruction and development."

In his opening remarks at the ministerial conference on Haiti, Cannon stated, "We also have with us today some members from the private sector who have given generously to the humanitarian appeal but will also play an important role in Haiti's future." Singling out several publicly owned sectors of the Haitian economy, he added that "They [members from the private sector] will be accompanying and supporting us in rebuilding the national infrastructure of ports, roads and power generation and in re-establishing essential services from electricity to banking and communications."

Apparently no participant felt the need to mention that under pressure from Western governments and international financial institutions, Haitian President René Préval (who has scarcely been seen in public since the earthquake) privatized public enterprises such as a cement company and flour mill during the nineties and announced plans in 2007 to sell off Téléco, the state-owned telephone company.

So it was probably no coincidence that James Dobbins, former special envoy to Haiti under President Bill Clinton and director of the International Security and Defense Policy Center at the RAND Corporation, wrote in a *New York Times* op-ed: "This disaster is an opportunity to accelerate oft-delayed reforms" including "breaking up or at least reorganizing the government-controlled telephone monopoly. The same goes with the Education

Ministry, the electric company, the Health Ministry and the courts."

The day after the earthquake, before the bodies were even cold, one financial analyst offered his hot stock picks. In an article entitled "An Opportunity to Heal Haiti" published on TheStreet.com, Scott Rothbort spoke of "opportunity in misfortune," explaining, "Here are some companies that could potentially benefit: General Electric (GE), Caterpillar (CAT), Deere (DE), Fluor (FLR), Jacobs Engineering (JEC)." Not wanting to be left out, mercenary companies are setting their sights on Haiti, too.

The Montreal conference did not go unopposed: The Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas, which includes Venezuela, Cuba, Ecuador and Bolivia, held a counter-conference and several Haiti solidarity organizations demonstrated outside the Friends of Haiti meeting, expressing skepticism that the conference would work to further the interests of ordinary Haitians.

One group protesting the conference, Haiti Action Montreal, warned: "There is a danger that these major powers will try to exploit the earthquake to further narrow pro-corporate ends, if reconstruction of New Orleans after Katrina and in Asia following the tsunami are any indication."

As Naomi Klein has observed, the Heritage Foundation's initial response to the earthquake followed the pattern she documented in her book *The Shock Doctrine*, by which proponents of neoliberalism

Continued on page 14

Haiti: How to Turn

SLOW FOOD

By day nine, the U.S. Southern Command said it had delivered 700,000 meals, but the World Food Program (WFP) said at least 2 million people required "food assistance," meaning more than 50 million meals were needed in that time frame. According to the *New York Times*, WFP flights carrying food, medicine and water were delayed for three days because they "had been diverted so that the United States could land troops and equipment and lift Americans and other foreigners to safety." By Jan. 23 the U.N. agency said it had reached only 313,000 people with food aid. It probably didn't help that in one instance the WFP stopped distributing food after recipients became frustrated after they were told to fill out forms.



CARIBBEAN CRUISES: THE FUN GOES ON

After "considerable internal debate," Royal Caribbean International docked a 4,370-passenger cruise ship at its \$55 million private beach in Labadie, Haiti, about 60 miles from the capital, just three days after the earthquake. While one passenger wrote online, "I just can't see myself sunning on the beach [while] there are tens of thousands of dead people being piled up on the streets," the company defended its actions by pointing to the 60 cases of food and water it donated. Then again, one "Voyager-Class" ship carries more than 200,000 pounds of food for a seven-day cruise and can generate 540,000 gallons of fresh water a day. Once in the fenced-in playground, passengers are free to enjoy such activities as a water park, zip line and a ride onboard an "alpine roller coaster" built into the mountainside (for only \$35).



DOCTORS WITHOUT AIRPORTS

Doctors Without Borders said in the first week five of its cargo flights carrying 85 tons of medical and relief supplies had been turned away from the main airport, which was under U.S. military control. One spokesperson for the aid group said the lack of medical equipment had forced doctors at one hospital "to buy a saw in the market" to perform amputations. According to the *Times* (U.K.) "Aid officials in Haiti ... were enraged when the airport was closed on Saturday [Jan. 16]" so Secretary of State Hillary Clinton could visit.



HAITI

MAPPING DISASTER

BY ARUN GUPTA
ILLUSTRATIONS BY FRANK REYNOSO

Since 1950, Port-au-Prince's population has exploded from 144,000 to about 2.5 million. While the wealthy capital-area suburb of Petionville was largely spared, with few homes destroyed, poor people packed in shoddy housing, bore the brunt of the death and destruction. The underdevelopment of Haiti is the underlying cause. Bipartisan U.S. policy for decades (and that of plain Haitian regimes) has been to displace the rural poor to the capital where they can serve as an extremely low-wage labor force. For one, the destruction of Haiti's rice farmers, who were unable to compete with U.S. agribusiness, forced many peasants off the land.



But one of the little-known stories is that of the Haiti's Creole pig. A well-adapted animal that was literally many rural families' "piggy bank," because it was a low-maintenance

livestock that provided a source of surplus nutrition and income, was wiped in the 1980s under heavy U.S. pressure, which feared an outbreak of African swine fever. It was replaced with U.S. breeds that required clean water, special feed, medicine and roofed pigpens. Unable to afford the American breeds, dubbed "four-footed princes," many peasants saw their income plummet, leading to a drop in rural school enrollment of 30 percent and deforestation, as peasants cut down mango trees (which were used mainly for pig feed) to use as charcoal.

For many years, peasants have been lured to the capital, where thousands have been employed sewing baseballs, Disney merchandise and garments, usually earning less than \$3 a day. This was policy under both George W. Bush and Bill Clinton, who are now in charge of the effort to help Haiti "rebuild."

While the earthquake was undoubtedly a natural disaster, how it was experienced and how the relief is being organized is defined by the same political and economic structures that doomed the poor to die on a massive scale.

Disaster into Catastrophe

CAP HAÏTIEN

LET THEM EAT PEPPER SPRAY

Calling desperate survivors queueing for food "animals," U.N. troops sprayed crowds with pepper spray after many tried to scramble for insufficient food supplies in the capital exactly two weeks after the earthquake. The previous day, other U.N. troops shot rubber bullets into a crowd of people also attempting to access food aid. Some Haitians were highly critical of the distribution, contending that if it were coordinated through churches with community groups providing security there would be far less chaos.

THIRSTY AMERICANS

On Jan. 21, *Democracy Now!* found that large supplies of bottled water were unloaded at the Port-au-Prince airport and then delivered directly to the U.S. Embassy. The next day the BBC reported that of 350 makeshift camps accommodating around 472,000 people, only six had access to water.

CUBAN DOCTORS FIRST ON SCENE

Cuban doctors were among the first to provide aid in Port-au-Prince because Cuba had 344 doctors and health professionals in Haiti, providing care in every major region. By Jan. 22, they had treated more than 20,095 patients and performed 1,954 surgeries.

SHOCK DOCTRINE

While Western governments, the International Monetary Fund and World Bank ponder whether to cancel Haiti's external debt of \$1.05 billion, Venezuela has already forgiven Haiti's debt of \$295 million. Last year, \$1.2 billion in debt was forgiven, but Haiti was still paying out millions every month. And now, the World Bank is considering a \$100 million loan instead of a grant, which will saddle Haiti with yet more debt.

PORT-AU-PRINCE

LEOGANE

SEARCH AND RESCUE THE RICH

Of 132 people pulled from the rubble by international search-and-rescue teams, at least 35 came from the posh Hotel Montana, favored by spies, diplomats and former U.S. President Bill Clinton. Seven teams scoured the site, some arriving within 24 hours. Florida's Lynn University even hired private search-and-rescue teams to find missing students and professors. According to the *Washington Post*, some rescue workers said, "The U.S. and other governments have focused more attention on those missing at the hotel than on Haitian survivors."

PLENTY OF TROOPS

During the first week of operations, the *Times* (U.K.) reported that 40 percent of incoming flights to the main airport were military. Both Brazil and France lodged official protests with Washington for prioritizing military flights over aid, with one French cabinet minister saying the U.S. role should be about "helping Haiti, not occupying Haiti." Within two weeks 15,400 U.S. troops were in Haiti or offshore on ships.

SEND IN THE DRONES

Aid deliveries may have been sparse and chaotic, but the U.S. Air Force managed to deploy one of its "high-end, high-flying spy drones, the RQ-4 Global Hawk" to Haiti within 48 hours of the disaster. The Oregon-based Evergreen International Aviation also claimed (and later denied) that it was flying at least one unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) over Haiti and was using its "fleet of 747's" and helicopters to ferry in supplies for unnamed clients.

AFTERSHOCKS

BY NICHOLAS POWERS

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti—Walking through the tent cities of Port-au-Prince, one sees in the hobbling amputees, skull-faced children and hungry people the aftershocks of "The Event."

On Jan. 12, for more than 40 seconds, the earth swayed beneath millions of Haitians. Roofs slid into streets squashing cars, buildings collapsed into clouds of pale dust and inside people were pulped.

No one knows how many survived initially, pinned between slabs of concrete. Some were pried out by family, neighbors and strangers digging through the dark of night. Later, international search-and-rescue teams sent dogs sniffing through rubble, searched by flashlight and salvaged a few more.

When the injured arrived at the makeshift hospitals at the airport, many had crushed limbs, bones jutting out of skin like branches and battered skulls. Thousands of amputations have been carried out; one doctor told the media, "Not since the Crimean war have surgeons amputated so many limbs."

At the Medishare tents at the Toussaint Airport a doctor led me to the operating theater where surgeons cleaned a man's leg and drilled pins into the bone to hold it. "We're using 1980s technology, but it's what we have," he said. "The wounds get infected and it becomes a race to keep them clean before gangrene sets in." He was haggard and weary. I saw dozens of Haitians lying in cots with bandaged stumps, eyes glazed with pain and fear.

Later that night, the doctors and I swallowed shots of Scotch. The liquor fired us up and one doctor leaned in slurring, "By Tuesday people are going to start dying of dehydration." We couldn't say anything and kept drinking.

The next day, I drove walked through the tent city of Champs de Mars in Port-au-Prince and saw bone-thin children limp in their mothers' arms. Fathers begged for food. I had nothing but questions to give. Has aid arrived? No. How long have they gone without food? Days.

Standing there, I knew that wave after wave of death will flow through Haiti as hun-

ger and thirst become starvation and dehydration. In the midst of interviewing people, I saw a blue tent, large, clean and new. The family inside told me they got it through a friend in the government. I pressed for the friend's name but the father shook his head, "No."

Angry neighbors told me that nine days after The Event, an aid truck filled with tents arrived, but amid the pushing and shoving, police came in. One man, Brunache Carlina, claimed the police took some tents and the rest quickly disappeared into the Ministry of Culture, where it is believed they were sold.

Another man, Fritz Jermin said the police beat the people, took the tents and sold them in the upper-class neighborhood of Petionville. I drove up the broken streets to Petionville. When I saw a tent I asked the owner how she got it. "Through a friend in the government," she said.

Every day people told me to tell Americans and the world not to give aid to the Haitian government but to hand it out themselves or channel it through international groups. I heard over and over a deep hate and distrust of the government (a government forced on them by the Americans). It is an aftershock of the earthquake.

But under these aftershocks is a quieter reverberation. On the way to Champs de Mars, my fixer told me Haitians were blaming Vodou priests for the earthquake. I told him it sounded like what Pat Robertson said. He insisted it was true.

When we arrived, I interviewed Ilonese Jullot, a 55-year-old mother of four. Her eyes seemed to float in sadness. When I asked her about the earthquake she said, "God is mad at the Haitians for Vodou. We need to get down our knees to ask forgiveness."

Her words echoed what Haitian banker Henri Nerée heard. As he gave me a ride in his truck to the U.N. compound, Nerée told me how he argued with men saying Vodou caused the earthquake. "No, it's nature, it's tectonic plates slipping against each other," he said, simulating the motion with his hands. "But they couldn't hear me. They aren't literate but they need validation and need to feel they know something even if they don't."

But it seemed to me more than ignorance; it was also internalized guilt as a way of coping with powerlessness by offering an illusion of

Continued on page 14

THE ZIONIZATION OF DISASTER RELIEF

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) were dispatched with haste to Haiti, setting up a field hospital and deploying search-and-rescue units. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu praised the effort as "in the best tradition of the Jewish people; this is the true covenant of the State of Israel and the Jewish people," adding, "this was an expression of our Jewish heritage and the Jewish ethic of helping one's fellow man." Others were not so moist-eyed. Yoel Donchin, a doctor who served as part of Israel's disaster relief efforts (and was subsequently barred after his comments became public), wrote that in general the IDF is more concerned with sending TV crews, spokespeople, photographers and high-tech medical equipment that looks good on television than with far more important supplies like sewage pipes, grave-digging equipment and portable toilets.



Remittances Fill Funding Fractures

BY JAISAL NOOR

Despite suffering a fractured vertebrae and a chest contusion, Leigh Carter feels lucky. "I always imagined an earthquake would start as a tremor," she says of the magnitude 7.0 earthquake that ravaged Haiti Jan. 12. But "we were at 7.0 very suddenly, being thrown violently around the office with everything moving, falling and crashing around us."

Carter, executive director of Fonkoze USA, was in the headquarters of Haiti's biggest micro-finance organization in Port-au-Prince on that day. She had spent the previous day reviewing Fonkoze's efforts to help Haiti recover from the four hurricanes that slammed into the country in 2008.

Though Fonkoze offers micro-credit loans, education and health programs to some 255,000 clients, Carter says it is Fonkoze's remittance and transfer services that are particularly vital at this moment.

"The thing that struck home was how critically important our transfer and remittance services are, right now it is just desperately needed. Haitians need to be getting their remittances from their families overseas," Carter told *The Indypendent*. Fonkoze transferred \$57 million in remittances to families in Haiti in 2009.

The immediate need for cash has been compounded by the failure of the aid effort. The United Nations estimates two million

Haitians require food and water.

In 2008, the million-strong Haitian diaspora remitted \$1.9 billion to the Western Hemisphere's poorest country, accounting for 18 percent of Haiti's gross domestic product. Before the earthquake three out of four Haitians were living on less than \$2 per day, while a third of the population relied on remittances.

The earthquake destroyed much of Haiti's infrastructure, including financial institutions, and many of the country's banks were closed more than a week after the earthquake. Remittances typically surge after a natural disaster, but many remitters are encountering difficulties sending money back to Haiti.

Gustave Zamy, a Haitian immigrant who has lived for 20 years in Flatbush, Brooklyn, lost seven relatives. His brother, sister, two daughters and mother survived, but he had trouble wiring money to them. "I had problems, I tried three times before it went through," he said.

On Jan. 15, he was finally able to send \$300 to his family, but the limited relief has him deeply concerned. "They're in bad condition over there. They have no food, or medicine, they have nothing," Zamy says.

Despite serious setbacks, including the deaths of three of five staff in its remittance department, Fonkoze credits its dedicated employees and strong community support for keeping most of its offices operating af-

ter the earthquake.

"Even when CNN was bragging about Unibank being able to open one of their branches, I wanted to scream, Fonkoze, Haiti's bank for the poor, never shut its doors," Carter says.

Founded in 1994 by a Haitian priest to provide financial services to Haiti's poorest, Fonkoze now has more than 700 employees and 42 branches located throughout Haiti.

Because the majority of its offices are located in rural areas, Fonkoze says it is uniquely positioned to help many of the people who have fled the wrecked capital. Eleven days after the earthquake, the Pentagon coordinated the delivery of \$2 million in cash to Fonkoze's branches across the country.

As of Jan. 25, Carter says, 38 of Fonkoze offices were open for business. Fonkoze and many other transfer services, including Western Union, have temporarily waived transfer fees. (Western Union charges 9 percent for all transfers from the United States to Haiti while Fonkoze charges a \$6 flat fee.)

Despite Fonkoze's present focus on remittances, Carter says it continues to offer all of its services to help lift its clients, 99 percent of whom are women, out of poverty. "We teach women to read and write, we work in malnutrition and access to healthcare."

Carter acknowledges that micro-finance is not the complete solution to Haiti's prob-

lems. "It's one way to bring people out of poverty, but we need infrastructure. We need funds to go into the government of Haiti. Quit funding just the NGO sector and isolating the government, that just won't work."

Since 2008, food shortages, natural disasters and a decline in remittances have spurred Haitian advocates to call on the U.S. government to grant undocumented Haitian immigrants Temporary Protected Status (TPS), which would allow them to apply for work permits. On Jan. 15, the Obama administration relented and authorized the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to allow an estimated 130,000 Haitian immigrants living in the United States to apply for TPS.

Acknowledging its benefits, immigrant advocates want TPS extended to Haitians arriving to the United States after Jan. 12 and to waive the \$470 application fee. They warn that a criminal record may render one ineligible and information required for the application process can be used in deportation proceedings when the program ends.

Dilip Ratha, the World Bank's lead economist on migration and remittances, writes that if "TPS resulted in a 20 percent increase in the average remittance per migrant, we would expect an additional \$360 million remittance flows to Haiti in 2010."



PHOTO: FLICKR.COM/CHUCK HOLTON

'New Haiti'

Continued from page 13

seek to impose an agenda of privatization in times of crisis.

Less than 24 hours after the earthquake, the Heritage Foundation issued a release recommending that, "In addition to providing immediate humanitarian assistance, the U.S. response to the tragic earthquake in Haiti offers opportunities to re-shape Haiti's long-dysfunctional government and economy as well as to improve the public image of the United States in the region."

When I asked World Bank Vice President for Latin America and the Caribbean Pamela Cox to elaborate on what kind of private sector role was being envisioned for Haiti's future, she said, "You'd have to talk to the private sector ... in the sense that they're the

ones who would be putting their money in so they'd have the decision. What we want to hear from them is what kinds of things they need, so that they can come back." Cox cited "one proposal" she'd heard for investment in the "garment manufacturing industry" — a sector that has long been associated with sweatshop labor practices in Haiti.

For anyone familiar with Haiti's experience of this sweatshop-based, pro-corporate development model over the years, the roadmap the banks and Friends are charting for the "new Haiti" is not in the least bit new. And, for the Haitian people, who have always paid the price for these failed policies, it is nothing less than disastrous.

A version of this article appeared on The-Nation.com.

Aftershocks

Continued from page 13

control: Prayer, atonement and redemption will keep you safe. If it doesn't, it's because we did not pray and atone hard enough.

Matching the loss of faith in government and Vodou is a rise of faith in the United States, whose government occupied Haiti from 1915 to 1934, backed the bloody Duvalier dictatorships and twice toppled the president of the poor, Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

In Port-au-Prince, I read on the walls, "We Don't Need the France. Help Only from U.S.A." and "In U.S.A. We Trust."

My fixer said, "Haitians believe in you Americans more than you believe in yourselves." I told him that was a dangerous faith; we will let them down.

He huffed, "Pray they don't turn on you because you don't want Haitians as enemies, not in the age of terrorism."

I fear for their future. The anger and mistrust of government, the loss of faith in the spirituality that kept Haitians rooted in their history and their turn to the United States is shifting Haitian culture into a dangerous direction.

Yet if months drift by and they still live in the streets, Haitians will have lost their last illusions. It is there at the end of faith when they may turn to the one source of strength they have left, each other, and we may witness another revolution.

They can become the earthquake that causes the City on the Hill to fall. As they say, "Deyo gen mone."

You have power, mine is more.

Gaza, One Year Later

BY ALEX KANE

BEIT HANOUN, Gaza Strip—One year after Israel's ferocious assault, Dr. Mustafa El-Hawi, a professor at Al-Aqsa University, traveled by bus to attend a protest against the continuing Israeli siege of Gaza. As the bus passed by still-devastated areas of Beit Hanoun, in the northeast of the 25-mile-long coastal strip, the U.S.- and British-educated El-Hawi reflected on those terrifying days.

"I spent 20 or 21 days living in the basement with my children and with three families of my neighbors. They were staying with us with no access to water or electricity, so we set fire in order to cook and just to feed my children," El-Hawi says.

El-Hawi, 51, lives in the densely packed Gaza City neighborhood of Tel Hawwa, which Israeli troops and tanks invaded in January 2009. "During that time, we don't sleep, we don't have access to proper medicine, to anything. We are expecting to die any time."

Arriving in Beit Hanoun in the morning of Dec. 31, El-Hawi joined about 600 Palestinians and 85 internationals to mark the one-year anniversary of the "Gaza massacres" that killed almost 1,400 Palestinians. The group attempted to march to the Erez border crossing with Israel, where about 1,000 demonstrators had gathered on the Israeli side, also protesting the siege. The Gaza group could come no closer than half a kilometer, however, for fear they would be shot by Israeli forces.

El-Hawi says his children were traumatized from being in a war zone. As for the rest of Gaza, he says, "We are living in jail. We are living in a cage, like chickens in a cage. There's nowhere to go. What do we do?"

FROZEN IN TIME

Time seems to stand still in Gaza. The scars left by 22 days of land, naval and aerial bombardment and invasion remain fresh. Thousands of tons of rubble remain where buildings once stood. Places like the American International School in Beit Lahiya, pulverized to chunks of concrete and wood by the Israeli Air Force.

More than 15,000 homes were destroyed or so severely damaged that 100,000 Palestinians were rendered homeless. Thousands still shelter outdoors in tents. Nearly 14,000 acres of farmland sit idle, either because they have been destroyed by Israeli bulldozers, declared off limits in Israel's deadly "buffer zones" or because farmers are denied access to seed, water and fertilizer. Seventy-five tons of depleted uranium contaminate the soil. Nearly half of Gaza's 122 health facilities were damaged or destroyed, and few have been fully repaired.

The blockade Israel and Egypt impose on Gaza has stifled reconstruction. Since the end of "Operation Cast Lead," barely four truckloads of construction material have been allowed in per month, as opposed to an average of 7,400 trucks a month before Israel choked off supplies. The trickle of cement, wood, glass and steel that makes it through smuggling tunnels is too expensive for most people in a territory where 80 percent of the population is impoverished.

Even before the war, 98 percent of industry was shuttered due to lack of supplies and 70 percent of families lived on less than one dollar a day per person. Gaza suffered more than \$650 million in losses due to the Israeli destruction of housing, commerce, industry and farming. Unemployment in Gaza is above 40 percent, and 80 percent of its people rely on U.N. aid.

Israel and Egypt imposed the blockade in 2007 when the Islamist movement, Hamas, took power in Gaza after winning democratic elections.

Norman Finkelstein, an author and scholar on Israel and Palestine, says the United States and Israel's logic behind the siege is to "teach Third World people what democracy means, and that means you elect people who we like, or you pay a price. And so the Gazans have to pay the price of electing the 'wrong' people into power."

Helena Cobban, a British-American journalist and the executive director of the Council for the National Interest, a progressive Washington, D.C. based organization that advocates a new direction for U.S. policy in the Middle East, visited Gaza last November.

"There are whole areas of northern Gaza that still look like Dresden 1945 or Coventry after it was bombed during the Second World War, because they haven't been able to rebuild anything," Cobbansaus. "That's the most stunning thing, that for one year, including the heat of summer and the cold of winter and rainstorms and anything else, no reconstruction materials have been allowed in by the Israelis at all."

FRESH MEMORIES

During the one-sided war, Majed Abusalam, a 21-year-old student and journalist, volunteered to travel with ambulances to transport the injured. He says Israelis often shot near the ambulances. During the assault, eight medical personnel were killed by Israel, 15 hospitals were damaged, and 29 ambulances were damaged or destroyed, according to the Palestinian Center for Human Rights.

Abusalam's uncle was killed by Israel in the first week of January.

"We didn't have bread in our house, and



CHILDHOOD HOME: Nine-year-old Abdullah Samouni stands in the wreckage of his home in March 2009 in the Zeitoun neighborhood of Gaza City. During the 2009 invasion of Gaza, Israeli forces ordered his family to move to a different home, which the Israeli military subsequently shelled, killing 30 family members. Israel's assault destroyed or severely damaged 15,000 homes, rendering 100,000 Gazans homeless. PHOTO: JESSIE BOYLAN

we wanted bread. [My uncle] went to bring us bread, and in the streets, they shot him. They cut all his body, and he was murdered," Abusalam says. "A lot of friends, I can't count, more than 40, 50, 60, I don't know, but there are a lot, a lot of friends were killed."

Testimonies like El-Hawi's and Abusalam's and reports from human-rights groups have led to growing calls for accountability for what many observers term Israeli war crimes. The U.N. Goldstone Commission report on the January 2009 Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Gaza concluded that "Operation Cast Lead," "was a deliberately disproportionate attack designed to punish, humiliate and terrorize a civilian population."

GAZA'S LUNG

The siege on Gaza has affected more than the flow of goods. El-Hawi is often prevented from attending conferences abroad because the borders are sealed.

Abusalam says that more than 25 of his friends have lost scholarships abroad because they couldn't leave Gaza, and another uncle died because he couldn't travel to Egypt for urgent medical treatment.

To circumvent the blockade, groups in Gaza have constructed hundreds of underground tunnels that cross into Egypt and serve as Gaza's "lung." According to one report, 80 percent of its imports now come through the tunnels.

Israel, however, bombs the tunnels frequently, and Egypt gasses them, even while people are still inside, according to the Israeli daily *Haaretz*. Egypt is also building a steel wall along its border with Gaza in or-

der to close off the tunnels. The wall, reportedly designed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, will be about six miles long and could extend up to 100 feet underground.

LIFE GOES ON

Nonetheless, life continues, whether it's scavenging building materials from the rubble, commerce based on the tunnel economy or schools operating on two or even three shifts a day to handle the influx of children displaced from bombed-out homes and schools.

Some, like Abusalam, cope by turning to activism. He frequently participates in demonstrations and recently protested the illegal Israeli buffer zone in Beit Hanoun.

Others, like the members of Da Arabian Revolutionary Guys Team, or Darg Team, turn to music. One of many political Palestinian hip-hop groups, the Darg Team recorded a music video, *23 Days*, immediately after the Israeli assault, which features them rapping in front of scenes of destruction in Gaza.

Rapper Sami Bakheet says, "The only thing we were thinking about is if we survived this what we should do, what should we write and how we should deliver this the right way, and that was the birth date of *23 Days*."

Darg Team manager Fadi Bakheet says the "nature of the Palestinian people" gives him hope.

"We live all what we go through for a reason," Bakheet says. "That reason is to go on in our life, to build a future for us and the next generation, and for fighting through our music so the whole world knows about the reality of Palestinians."



Through supporters like you, *The Indypendent* raised \$900 at our Jan. 17 Gaza/Egypt Reportback and Benefit to support three Gaza relief groups:

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MON, FEB 6 • 7:30pm-9:30pm

10-SESSION CLASS BEGINS: "Revolutions: The Paris Commune of 1871" with Rust Gilbert & Michael Lardner. Tuition: \$95-\$125

SAT, FEB 13 • 7pm

BOOK PARTY: *THE WAR BEFORE: THE TRUE LIFE STORY OF SAFYA BUKHARI* who was a member of the Black Panther Party and Black Liberation Army and one of the founders of the Free Mumia Abu Jamal Coalition and the Jericho Movement. *The War Before* is a collection of Buhhari's writings.

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LOCAL

A Faith-driven Renaissance

BY AMY L. DALTON

On Saturday, Jan. 23, a dozen musicians, comedians and spoken word artists teamed up at Harlem's historic Apollo Theater for a multilingual, transnational explosion of Muslim arts and culture. The event was headlined by hip-hop artist and actor Mos Def and coordinated by the Chicago-based Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN).

"We're trying to do something that comes from the heart and goes to the heart," said founder and Executive Director Rami Nashashibi. He started IMAN in 1995 to create a holistic antidote to the painful experience of poverty and abandonment in the inner city. Deeply rooted in the spiritual vision of the oneness of humanity — "iman" means "faith" in Arabic — the network organizes around a three-pronged strategy to "change, serve and inspire."

The group's efforts to link Islamic culture and activism are all the more important in the wake of attacks on Muslims since 9/11. Hostility toward Muslims was heightened by the widely publicized attempted airline bombings on Dec. 26.

Saturday's sold-out event, which also marked the opening of an IMAN branch in New York City, encapsulated this philosophy. From Progress Theater's biting performance piece on the experience of a Black Muslim woman being photographed in her hijab by tourists to the exacting call from hip-hop duo "The ReMINDers" to "feel the transition from denial to acceptance," the artists linked the delicate process of healing and self-awareness with the ability to act for change.

The gathering opened with a reading from the Quran in Arabic, and closed with a formal prayer. In between, informal expressions of prayer and praise were incorporated into almost every performance. Among these supplications were repeated prayers and expressions of anguish on behalf of and love for the people of Haiti.

A collection was taken up for the service agency Islamic Relief, which has opened three camps in Haiti to assist in the humanitarian response to the earthquake. Nashashibi also addressed the political implications of the disaster in Haiti, praising Obama for extending Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to undocumented Haitians who were already living in the United States and saying that IMAN would be active in urging him to extend TPS to Haitians who might be forced to relocate due to the catastrophe.

IMAN's efforts in New York

will use arts and culture as a starting point for building direct service and social change initiatives.

This focus comes out of a year-long study of the daily patterns and needs of New York City's Muslim population; the study concluded that spiritually rooted arts would be the most effective way to bring this group of nearly one million people from more than 30 different countries together.

"We see these [arts, service and social change] as intimately connected," said Asad Jafri, who is the national director of arts and culture for IMAN. "We need creative expression of the needs and issues, tri-

ing on the African-American tradition of trailblazing.

"Bringing IMAN to the Apollo is a reminder to the American Muslim community of its roots in the African-American community," added Amir Al-Islam, chairman of IMAN's board and professor at Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn.

Brooklyn-based writer Ibrahim Abdul-Matin, who co-hosted the event, reminded audience members of the history, and future, of the arts in Harlem. "[In the 1920s] there was a Black arts renaissance in Harlem. Today there's a Muslim arts renaissance in Harlem!"

Cultivating the capacity of art-



SPEAKING UP: Performers Mos Def (above) and Liza Garza (below) highlight Muslim art and culture at the Inner-City Muslim Action Network show at the Apollo Theater Jan. 23. PHOTO: ANDREW HINDERAKER

umphs and struggles that communities are going through in order to do the work of repairing and changing our society. Hundreds of years ago, music in Islamic culture was used to heal people with mental illnesses. Today, with our culture of capitalism and measurement, we lose faith in these non-quantifiable aspects of human life. But we need them now, especially in these trying times."

The link between Middle Eastern Muslims and Muslims of African American descent was a particular focus. Well over half of the artists who performed at IMAN's event were Black, and organizers emphasized that they were build-

ists to unite communities is an ongoing focus for IMAN, Jafri said. For years, IMAN has been holding retreats in which artists discuss how to increase their impact as community leaders, and support each other in extending the call for unity and change.

"We are demonstrating that there is power in Muslim unity," Abdul-Matin said. "New York is a city of islands, of villages. To bridge those villages, we need connectors — these are our connectors!"

For more information, visit imancentral.org.

History Loses One of Its Own

HOWARD ZINN DIES, 87

BY JESSICA LEE

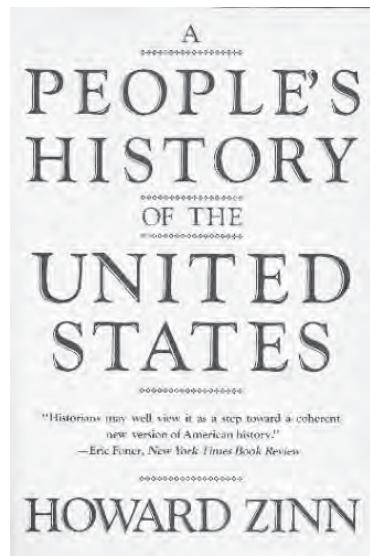
Legendary historian, playwright and social activist Howard Zinn likely died just the way he would have wanted — from a heart bursting with love and revolutionary spirit while on a speaking tour highlighting the voices of uncommon heroes in American history.

Zinn, 87, passed away from a heart attack while in Santa Monica, Calif., just days before a planned performance at the Santa Monica Museum of Art. He lived in Auburndale, Mass., and was a professor emeritus in the Political Science Department at Boston University.

The People Speak, a dramatic musical performance of letters, diaries and speeches by everyday Americans throughout history, was Zinn's latest project. His book, *A People's History of the United States*, has sold more than one million copies since it was published in 1980 and has become a text routinely used in classrooms across the country.

Born in Brooklyn in 1922 to Jewish immigrant parents who were factory workers with a limited education, Zinn said that he was introduced to literature when he received the collected works of Charles Dickens through a 25-cent coupon offer in the *New York Post*.

When 17 years old, at the urging of young Communists in the neighborhood, he attended his first political rally in Times Square. "Suddenly, I heard the sirens sound, and I looked around and saw the policemen on horses galloping into



the crowd and beating people ... and then I was hit. I turned around and I was knocked unconscious," he told the Associated Press.

Zinn's fierce antiwar activism was rooted in his experience as a pilot during World War II after he participated in the bombing of Germany, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Returning from war, he attended New York University on the GI Bill and received his PhD in history from Columbia University. In his doctoral dissertation, focused on the congressional career of Fiorello LaGuardia, he argued that LaGuardia represented "the conscience of the twenties" as he fought for public power, the right to strike and a redistribution of wealth through taxation.

While teaching at Atlanta's Spelman College in the 1950s, Zinn participated in civil rights campaigns to protest segregation policies. One of his young students

at the time was writer Alice Walker. Although tenured, he was dismissed in 1963 due to his support of female student's involvement in direct action against segregation in Atlanta.

Throughout his tenure as an academic and writer, Zinn testified as an expert witness at several historic trials, including that of Daniel Ellsberg and the Camden 28. He was a vocal critic of the wars of the last 50 years, including Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan. His 1967 book, *Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal* (Beacon Press), was the first book to call for the immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops with no conditions.

He received scores of awards, most recently the 2010 New York University Martin Luther King, Jr. Humanitarian Award on Jan. 21.

If Zinn had lived another day, he certainly would have immediately expressed criticism of President Obama's State of the Union address.

"I've been searching hard for a highlight," Zinn wrote in *The Nation* Jan. 21 about the first year of the Obama administration. "I don't see any kind of a highlight in his actions and policies. ... I think people are dazzled by Obama's rhetoric, and that people ought to begin to understand that Obama is going to be a mediocre president — which means, in our time, a dangerous president."

This echoes what he told *The Independent* a year earlier, just after the election: "And if he [Obama] doesn't act, it will be up to the people, as it always has been, to raise a shout that will be heard around the world — and compel the politicians to listen."

ment (beware of such moments!) but as an endless succession of surprises, moving zigzag toward a more decent society. We don't have to engage in grand, heroic actions to participate in the process of change. Small acts, when multiplied by millions of people, can transform the world.

It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness. If we remember those times and places — and there are so many — where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction.

And if we do act, in however small a way, we don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory.

This article was excerpted from a longer version published Sept. 2, 2004, in *The Nation*.

HISTORY: CRUELTY AND COMPASSION

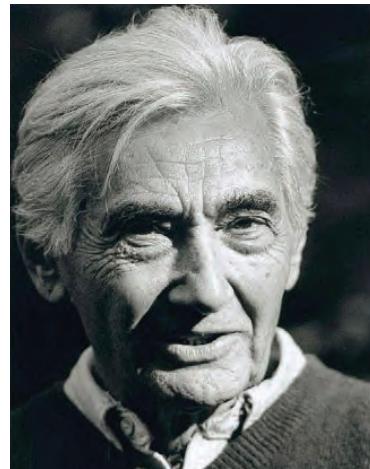
BY HOWARD ZINN

In this awful world where the efforts of caring people often pale in comparison to what is done by those who have power, how do I manage to stay involved and seemingly happy?

I am totally confident not that the world will get better, but that we should not give up the game before all the cards have been played. The metaphor is deliberate; life is a gamble. Not to play is to foreclose any chance of winning. To play, to act, is to create at least a possibility of changing the world.

There is a tendency to think that what we see in the present moment will continue. We forget how often we have been astonished by the sudden crumbling of institutions, by extraordinary changes in people's thoughts, by unexpected eruptions of rebellion against tyrannies, by the quick collapse of systems of power that seemed invincible.

It's clear that the struggle for justice should never be abandoned because of the apparent overwhelming power of those who have the



HOWARD ZINN

PHOTO: IDENTITYTHEORY.COM

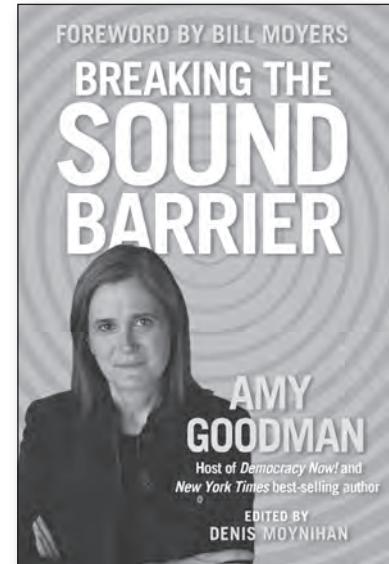
guns and the money and who seem invincible in their determination to hold on to it. That apparent power has, again and again, proved vulnerable to human qualities less measurable than bombs and dollars: moral fervor, determination, unity, organization, sacrifice, wit, ingenuity, courage, patience.

Revolutionary change does not come as one cataclysmic mo-

Amy Goodman

Edited by Denis Moynihan,
foreword by Bill Moyers, \$16

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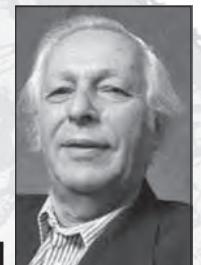
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Dances With Space Smurfs

Avatar
DIRECTED BY JAMES CAMERON
FOX MOVIES, 2009

Under what rock have you been hiding to miss the storm around James Cameron's environmental parable, *Avatar*? Certainly not beneath a hunk of unobtanium: it floats. In Cameron's epic, this strange rock is the occasion for a future conflict on a world far away between the organic, indigenous Na'vi and the imperial, profit-driven humans, who are looking to dig the very soul out of the hyper-lush moon of Pandora.

The film, distributed by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation — owner of right-wing media around the world — has caught flack from conservative critics for peddling a message that's hostile to the American way, imputing only malign motives to corporations and only destructive impulses to capitalism. However, one imagines that the film's billion-dollar earnings will soothe Murdoch's right-wing conscience.

As for Cameron, it's clear that he courted criticism by consciously producing an "environmental" film. In an earlier "scriptment," the project that became *Avatar* had a far richer back story. He explains that it centers on the "basic principles of interstellar imperialism, circa 2100 A.D."

In the original tale, we see an Earth denuded of life. Half of the planet's species are extinct. The rich live in Yosemite, an upscale condo park. The poor are left to farm algae on the coasts, eating the only source of food left to humans. The hero, Josh (not Jake) Sully is never promised his legs back. He's simply promised the possibility of an avatar that can walk on a world that has greenery, both of which are impossible for him on Earth.

In the *Avatar* that made it to production, nation-states have

been consigned to the dustbin of history. The movie opens on a colonial mining expedition to a blue-green moon in the Alpha Centauri system. The company behind it all is called the "Resource Development Alliance," and the resource that RDA wants is unobtanium — a room-temperature semiconductor that only exists on Pandora.

To get the resource, the company avails itself of two bedrock concepts in empire-building: development and alliance. It comforts the public and the shareholders on Earth to know that what they bring to the colonized savages on Pandora involves both partnership and progress.

Indeed, there's a scene where the RDA representative bemoans the lack of gratitude and cooperation from the indigenous people. "We build them schools and teach them English ... give them medicine ... roads! But they prefer mud."

On today's Earth, in contrast, when oil companies tear through jungle, desert and tundra in search of oil, they don't trouble themselves with the natives, much less bother to teach them English. Martin Boorman's *Emerald Forest* captured this all too well.

So why bother to teach the Na'vi English, when the profit motive demands they be killed or moved elsewhere?

Back on Earth, Obama's Secretary of Education Arne Duncan explains why education is so vital: "There's a real sense of economic imperative. We have to educate our way [to] a better economy."

Perish the thought that education should have a social imperative. These days, its function is to make money.

So it is on Pandora. The original reason the Na'vi are being taught English is so that they can work in the mines for RDA. It's far too expensive to blast humans four light years across space to a place where they'll perish quickly without oxygen. When there's the making of

a local workforce right there, the economics speak for themselves. Hence the need to forge an alliance, even if through the barrel of a gun.

Although analogies have been made with Native conquest, the *Avatar* that was never made is far more interesting, blending the economics of conquest with the imperatives of the slave trade and the concept of the modern developmental state. Sadly, all we see is a thin *Pocahontas* in Space, ably satirized by *South Park* in the episode "Dances With Smurfs."

Having a clearer back story might have left audiences readier for action after recycling their 3-D glasses and leaving the theater. Fan forums are overflowing with tales of depression and hopelessness about our planet's prospects. The movie ends with humans kicked out of paradise to "return to their dying world." Stumbling out into a bleak parking lot after having been surrounded by so much green, it's hard not to feel that happiness might be more easily found in space than on Earth.

Certainly, the physical wrench from blue-green moon to buttery multiplex isn't easy. We learn in the scriptment that the Na'vi have a Commons, a public space where all of The People can talk.

There's no such free speech in a multiplex. There is, however, always space for resistance. *Avatar* provides a language to explain the voraciousness of a system we're currently living in, and a chance to point to resistance that thrives right here on Earth. It's an opportunity to talk to everyday folk about the need for change in ways that use a common language.

Like Octavia Butler, I've always thought science fiction's virtues lie not in the future it foretells, but in the present it diagnoses and the prescriptions we might imagine together. So, if you're feeling blue after watching *Avatar*, consider these words, which end Butler's es-



DAVID HOLLOWBACH

say "Positive Obsession":

"But still I'm asked, what good is science fiction to Black people?"

"What good is any form of literature to Black people?"

"What good is science fiction's thinking about the present, the future, and the past? What good is its tendency to warn or to consider alternative ways of thinking and doing? What good is its examination of the possible effects of science and technology, or social organization and political direction? At its best, science fiction stimulates

imagination and creativity. It gets reader and writer off the beaten track, off the narrow, narrow footpath of what 'everyone' is saying, doing, thinking — whoever 'everyone' happens to be this year."

"And what good is all this to Black people?"

—RAJ PATEL

Raj Patel is a writer, activist and academic. His recent books include *The Value of Nothing* and *Stuffed and Starved*.

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